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Earl Warren

How JFK report split Warren and Hoover

By Alexander Charns
SPECIAL TO THE EXAMINER

Government documents indicate that Chief Justice Earl Warren's investigation into President John F. Kennedy's assassination may have caused the breakup of a longtime political alliance between Warren and FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover.

This friendship, which began in the 1930s when Warren was district attorney of Alameda County, ended after the release of the Warren Commission's report on Kennedy's murder.

More than 1,300 pages of FBI records released under the Freedom of Information Act show that a cooperative relationship between Warren and the FBI began after Warren formed the anti-racket council of Alameda County in 1933 and enlisted the help of Hoover.

This alliance continued during Warren's governorship of California and included a secret FBI program that provided him access to internal security information.

Later, as chief justice, Warren was on the FBI's "Special Correspondents" list of prominent citizens perceived to be strong supporters of the FBI.

He was taken off the list after the Warren Commission released its report in September 1964, which criticized the FBI.

To date, biographers have assumed that Hoover disliked Warren because of his liberal court decisions protecting the rights of criminal defendants, helping to end racial segregation and

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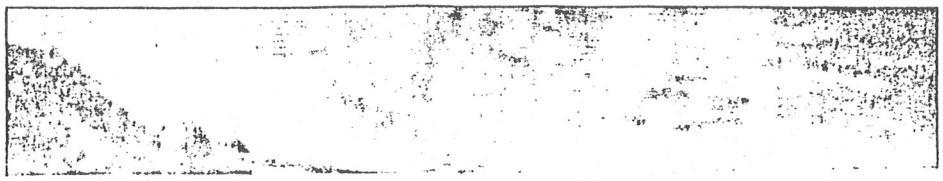
J. Edgar Hoover

Killer avalanche in Sierra

Backlash worries Israelis



'All I saw was white,' says Marin survivor

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WARREN

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upholding the First Amendment rights of communists.

But the documents show a rift beginnin nine days after the Warren Commission's first meeting. In a memo dated Dec. 14, 1963, Hoover wrote that the FBI's report on the assassination had been leaked to the press:

"I informed the attorney general (Robert F. Kennedy) that (columnist Drew) Pearson got a portion of the story from the chief justice, with whom he is very close; that I got this from inside the Pearson organization and that the chief justice had been very much annoyed at the information to come out in the FBI report."

But at least one former bureau official has admitted that the FBI itself had leaked portions of the report during this time.

From outward appearances, the chief justice and Hoover seemed as cordial as ever during the investigation. Hoover wrote, "On May 13, 1964, at the invitation of Chief Justice Earl Warren, I had luncheon with the chief justice in his private dining room.

"We discussed generally the problems affecting law enforcement and also those which have arisen in connection with the work of the Presidential Commission ... headed by the chief justice and before which I was to appear the following day. The luncheon was entirely pleasant."

This document was not among the materials released concerning Warren, but was obtained earlier by Harold Weisberg, author of "Whitewash" and five other books attacking the findings of the Warren Commission.

Another FBI document indicates that Hoover was opposed to forming the commission and prepared dossiers on members and staff members that were updated after the report was issued.

Furthermore, dossiers were prepared on the sex lives of commission critics. The same bureau "tickler file" refers to other reports concerning FBI attempts to impede the investigation, such as withholding information from the panel.

The panel's report concluded that Kennedy was shot by Lee Howard Oswald alone and found no evidence that Oswald was part of a conspiracy.

The Warren Report criticized the FBI for taking an "unduly restrictive view of its role in preventive intelligence work prior to the assassination.

"A more carefully coordinated treatment of the Oswald case by the FBI might well have resulted in bringing Oswald's activities to the attention of the Secret Service."

Hoover called the report's critique of the FBI unfair and unjust. Less than three months later, Warren was taken off the FBI "Special Correspondents" list.

According to David J. Garrow, author of "The FBI and Martin Luther King Jr." and associate professor of political science at City College of New York, the "Special Correspondents" list was a "high-ranking list of friends ... of J. Edgar Hoover ... who in many instances had done political or personal favors" for the FBI.

In short, Garrow said, it was an elite "J. Edgar Hoover fan club."

According to Amelia Fry, the commission "interfered" with Hoover's "private domain" and the Warren Report constituted "a betrayal by someone he worked with and did favors for."

Fry, who is on leave from the Regional Oral History Office at the University of California at Berkeley, which houses the Earl Warren Oral History Project, believes that Warren was a "very ethical man," but his main concern as chairman of the commission was probably to "make sure the ship of state doesn't get upended."

She said Warren displayed a similar attitude when he supported the relocation of Japanese-Americans during World War II.

In 1979, the Warren Commission was criticized in the report of the House Select Committee on Assassinations as failing to "investigate adequately the possibility of a conspiracy to assassinate the president."

"In large measure, the Warren Commission's inadequacies in investigating important aspects of the president's assassination were result of failures by the CIA and FBI to provide it with all relevant evidence and information," the committee said.

Author Weisberg believes that Warren knew the FBI was withholding information from the commission. Warren believed it was his "national duty to preserve tranquility," Weisberg said, and therefore Warren did not press the FBI.

But according to G. Edward White, professor of law at the University of Virginia and author of "Earl Warren: A Public Life," the chief justice "really believed, given what they were investigating, that the FBI and CIA would cooperate with the commission."

For the most part, the governor used the FBI program to request derogatory information about prospective political appointees.

The files show that FBI favors were provided to Warren, such as a personal car and driver while traveling on several occasions, helping his wife obtain a passport and aid with other family matters when requested.

"Whatever the governor requests, I want prompt attention accorded it," Hoover wrote in 1951.

One of the final entries in the

San Francisco Examiner

FBI's file is a letter from Hoover to Warren after the chief justice announced his resignation in 1968. "You have contributed untiringly and unselfishly to furthering the best interests of the nation and your record of achievements will long stand as a monument to you," Hoover wrote.

A notation was affixed to the bureau's copy: "Chief Justice Warren was formerly on the Special Correspondents List but was deleted Dec. 11, 1964. He was then known to the director on a first-name basis."

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